

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5097

As of February 1, 2013

Title: An act relating to allowing spouses to combine volunteer hours for purposes of receiving a complimentary discover pass.

Brief Description: Allowing spouses to combine volunteer hours for purposes of receiving a complimentary discover pass.

Sponsors: Senators Becker, Pearson, Bailey, Hatfield, Holmquist Newbry, Tom, Schoesler, Rivers, Honeyford, Padden, Roach and Parlette.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/24/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) are charged with managing the public lands of the state. The DFW owns or manages nearly 1 million acres of public land for fish and wildlife, habitat conservation, and wildlife-related recreation. The DNR protects and manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned land. State Parks manages 117 developed parks on over 100,000 total acres.

Until July 1, 2011, there was no charge to the public for access to DNR or State Parks land and recreational sites. DFW charged \$10 for the annual fish and wildlife lands vehicle use permit, or the permit was provided free of charge with all hunting and fishing licenses. State Parks has historically been funded with varying levels of the state general fund. In response to reductions in general fund support, and in an effort to make State Parks self-supporting, in 2011 the Legislature created the Discover Pass permit as a way to increase contributions from users.

The Discover Pass allows visitors to park or drive in designated recreational areas located on state lands owned or managed by DNR, DFW, and State Parks. Visitors to state recreational lands must obtain an annual Discover Pass or a day-use permit allowing vehicle access for one calendar day. The Discover Pass permit is valid for two vehicles for 12 months from the point of purchase at a cost of \$30, while a day-use permit costs \$10. A volunteer who

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performs 24 hours of service on agency-sanctioned projects in a given year is entitled to receive a complimentary Discover Pass.

There are certain limited exceptions to the requirement to have a Discover Pass. Holders of certain hunting and fishing licenses may access DFW recreation lands and water-access sites if they possess a DFW provided Vehicle Access Pass. Some special interest groups are also entitled by law to receive free or discounted access passes to state parks. These passes include the senior citizen's pass, a disability pass, a lifetime veteran's disability pass, and a foster home pass. Any Washington resident who is a veteran and has a service-connected disability of at least 30 percent can get a lifetime veteran's disability pass entitling the veteran to free use of any campsite and free admission to any state park.

The Discover Pass was originally projected to raise \$64 million in revenue during the 2011-13 biennium, with 84 percent, or \$54 million, going to State Parks and 8 percent each to DFW and DNR to operate the recreation lands under their management. Based on collections so far, the Discover Pass is now projected to raise \$33 million for the 2011-13 biennium.

Summary of Bill: Married spouses who collectively perform 24 hours of volunteer service on agency-sanctioned projects are entitled to receive a complimentary Discovery Pass.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2013.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill should not have much of an impact because spouses typically use the same vehicle. The agencies have fairly limited criteria as to what constitutes volunteer activity. Often volunteers have dedicated much more time to the agency than what is accounted for. This is a small compensation to those volunteers who often spend countless hours volunteering and their own resources in getting to a volunteer site.

CON: Allowing spouses to combine hours will likely lead to lower volunteer hours that are desperately needed by the agency. We need to maximize volunteer hours and not give people a shorter route to the prize.

OTHER: Volunteers generally put in many more hours than are needed. Many do not volunteer because they get a Discover Pass, but do so because they care about the parks system. We caution that the allowance to combine hours is limited to married persons, and some groups may feel slighted.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Joan Fleming, Back Country Horsemen of WA; James King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation.

CON: Gary Vierra, WA State Federation of State Employees.

OTHER: Daniel Farber, State Parks.